



Understanding the Terminology: Equine-Assisted Activities and/or Therapies (EAA-T)

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Received Date: March 01, 2022; Published Date: March 14, 2022

Abstract

The population of United States (U.S.) veterans is multifaceted and complex. Twenty-two veterans commit suicide daily. Addressing various significant veteran needs requires a multitude of resources and solutions beyond traditional healthcare. Research on veterans who participate in equine assisted activities and/or therapies (EAA-T) demonstrate a reduction in PTSD symptoms, stress, depression, and anxiety while indicating improved quality of life. Given the potential benefits of EAA-T it is important for healthcare professionals to have a basic understanding of the industry.

Keywords: EAA-T; Brain injury; Stress disorder

Background

The population of United States (U.S.) veterans is multifaceted and complex. Twenty-two veterans commit suicide daily [1]. Many other veterans suffer from traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health disorders, substance use disorders, exhibit high risk taking behaviors, chronic pain, and homelessness which may alter their sense of social connectedness and put them at greater risk for depression. They have complex deployment and social issues including, but not limited to, very high divorce rates, unemployment, and basic civilian reintegration issues related to multiple deployments [2]. Addressing various significant veteran needs requires a multitude of resources and solutions beyond traditional healthcare.

Literature Review

Research on veterans who participate in equine assisted activities and/or therapies (EAA-T) demonstrate a reduction in PTSD symptoms, stress, depression, and anxiety while indicating improved quality of life [3-7]. Clinical studies

suggest that individuals of all ages and levels of cognitive development can benefit from EAA-T and have found EAA-T to be effective in treating a multitude of mental health and behavioral issues. Given the potential benefits of EAA-T it is important for healthcare professionals to have a basic understanding of the industry.

Organizations

There are three main organizations: a) Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.); b) American Hippotherapy Association (AHA, Inc.) whose members certify through the American Hippotherapy Certification Board (AHCB); and c) Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA). PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc. were originally known as the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA), established in 1969. In 1992, AHA, Inc. became its own entity, but it was not until 2011, that NARHA officially changed its name to PATH Intl. EAGALA was founded in 1999 [8-10].

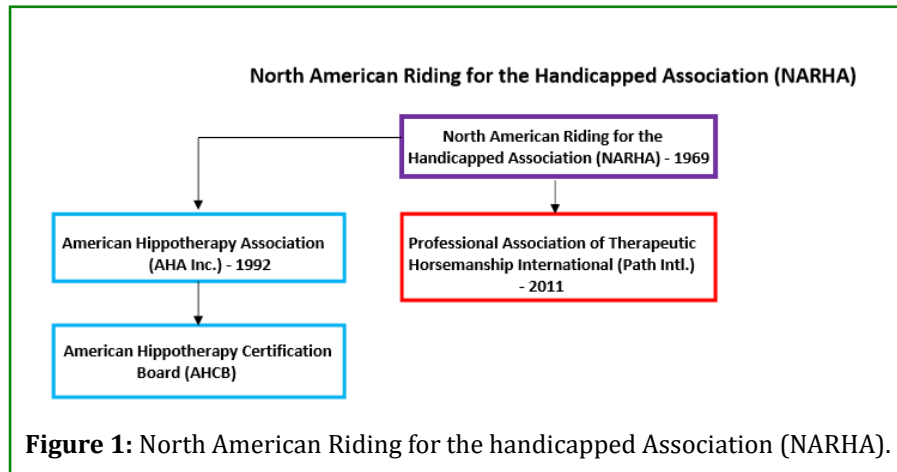


Figure 1: North American Riding for the handicapped Association (NARHA).

Terminology

Since healthcare professionals are mandated to use the billing codes that most accurately describe the medical treatment services being rendered, it is important to understand the difference(s) among each organization and determine whether the service rendered is considered therapeutic or therapy.

Here is where it gets complex. Each organization has its own set of terms and regulations regarding equine assisted activities and/or therapies. This article attempts to stay neutral, however, for the purposes of this discussion it will

use EAA-T as an acronym for equine assisted activities and/or therapies, equine assisted psychotherapy (instead of equine-facilitated psychotherapy), and will not incorporate hyphens in the terms (as PATH Intl. does).

Equine Assisted Activities and/or Therapies (EAA-T): PATH Intl. uses the umbrella term Equine-Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT), whereas, AHA, Inc. uses Equine Assisted Activities or Therapies (EAA/T). Both PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc. subdivide EAA-T into equine assisted activities (EAA) and equine assisted therapies (EAT). EAGALA does not use this umbrella term.

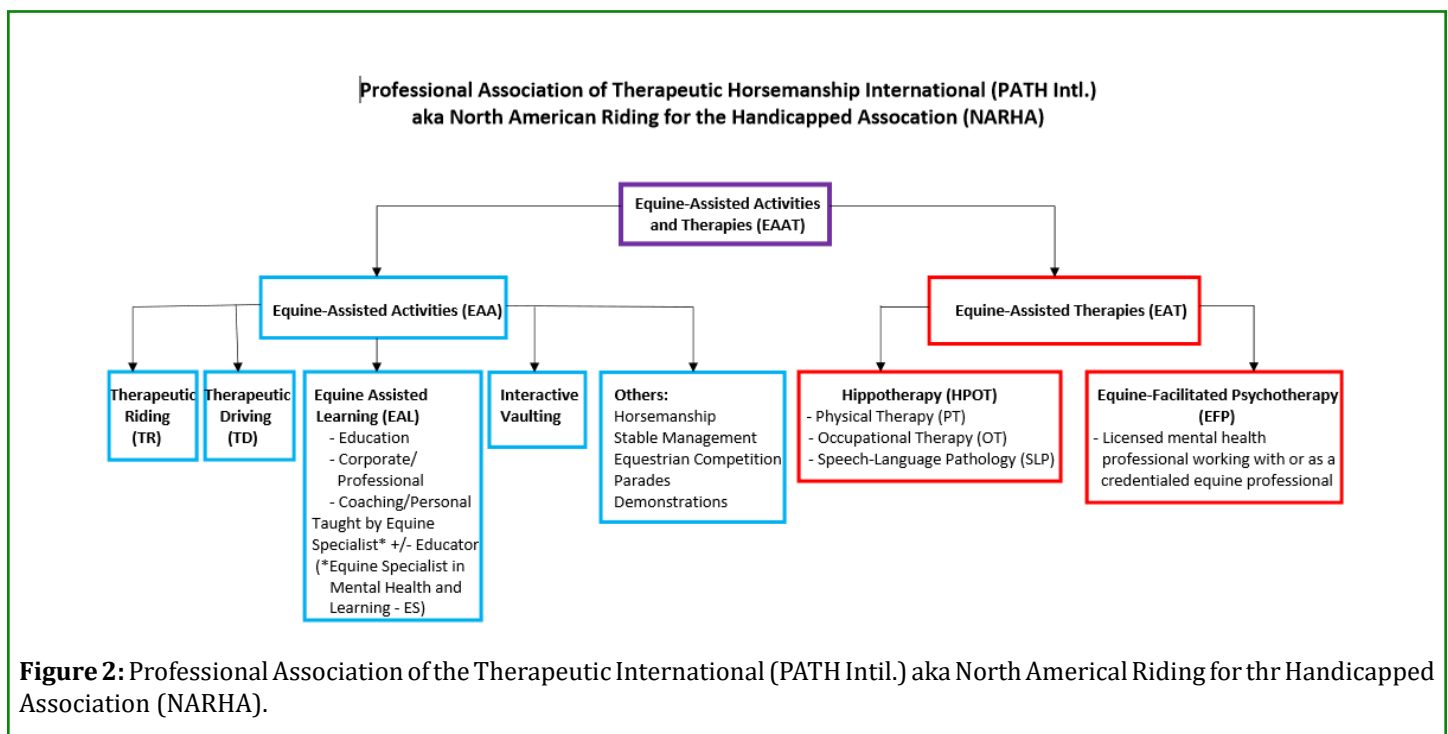
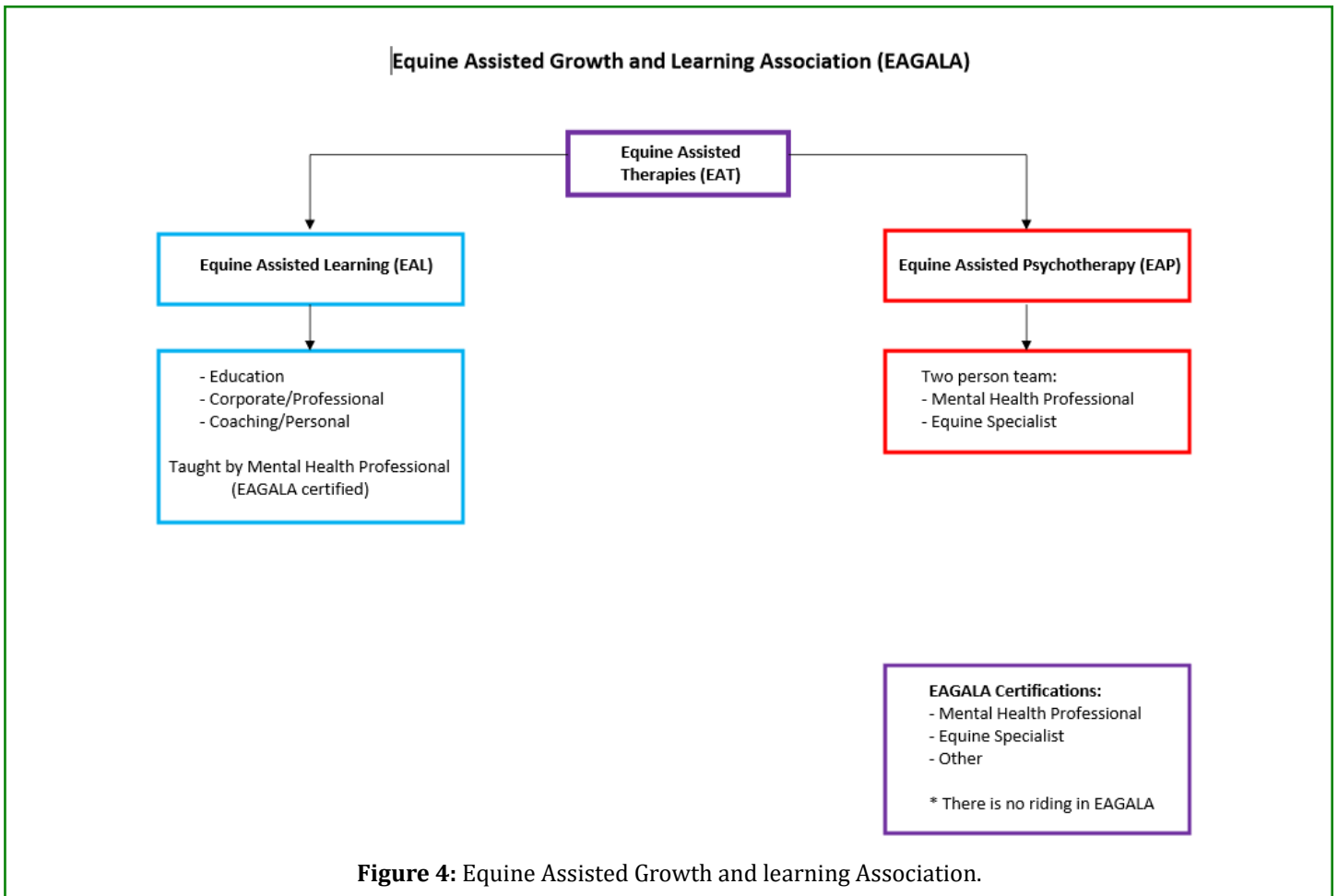
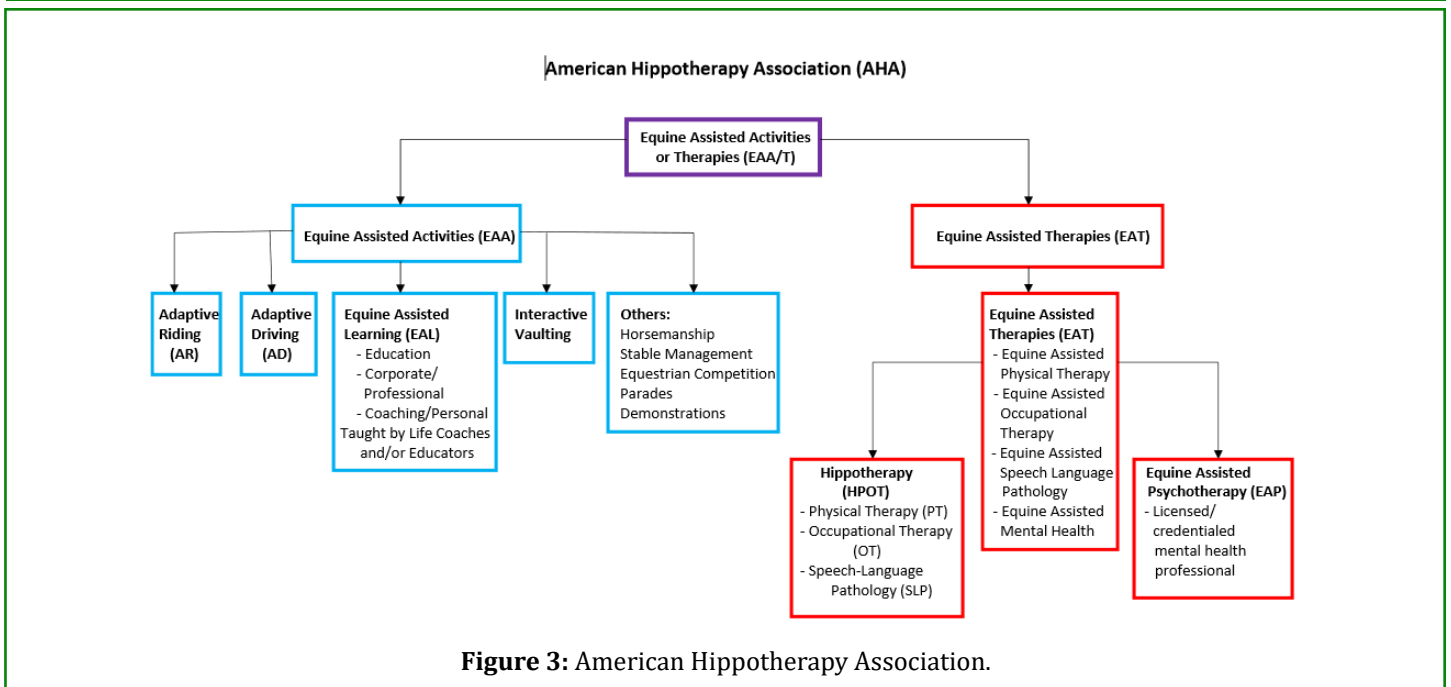


Figure 2: Professional Association of the Therapeutic International (PATH Intl.) aka North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA).



Equine Assisted Activities (EAA): There are some significant differences with EAA among PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc., most notably the use of 'adaptive' versus 'therapeutic.' There are also differences among their certification requirements: a) PATH Intl. requires EAA instructor certification (e.g. Therapeutic Riding Instructor, Therapeutic Driving Instructor, Interactive Vaulting Instructor); b) AHA, Inc. does not require EAA instructor certification, allowing life coaches and teachers to lead some EAA sessions (e.g. Equine Assisted Learning). EAGALA does not incorporate EAA into its model.

Equine Assisted Therapies (EAT): All three organizations include EAT and mandate that EAT be provided (at least) by a licensed healthcare professional in their respective field (i.e. Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech/Language Pathology, or Mental Health).

Hippotherapy (HPOT): While the term hippotherapy is often used to describe an occupation, there is no such thing. PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc. use the term hippotherapy as it refers to how a Physical Therapist (PT), Occupational Therapist (OT), Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), use equine movement as a therapy. Hippotherapy is a treatment tool or treatment strategy applied by the aforementioned therapist(s). It is not a therapeutic procedure and does not have its own billing code (AHA, Inc., 2018). PATH Int. and AHA, Inc. endorse certification of the licensed therapist through the American Hippotherapy Certification Board (AHCBB). EAGALA does not incorporate HPOT into its model.

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)*: All three organizations incorporate EAP and mandate that EAP be provided by a licensed Mental Health Professional (working with or as a credentialed equine specialist). Mental Health Professionals include, but are not limited to, Clinical Psychologists, Professional Counselors, Clinical Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, Psychiatric-Mental Health Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, or Psychiatrists. *PATH Intl. refers to EAP as equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP).

Equine Assisted Learning (EAL): Whereas PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc. define EAL as an equine assisted *activity*, EAGALA defines it as an equine assisted *therapy* led by a Mental Health Professional (that is EAGALA certified). Both PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc. do not mandate a college-degree/license to lead an EAL session, however, PATH Intl. does require working with or as an Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning [11-14].

Conclusion

Traditional therapies and prescription drugs have largely failed in preventing the incredible numbers of suicides

and suicide attempts in veterans. Mental health and social disorders have continued to rise in the veteran population (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2017). The use of EAA-T are uniquely suited to address the entire physiology of the veteran and foster the skills needed to achieve lasting social connection and the reduction of traumatic sequelae.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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